DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 270 279 RC 015 789

AUTHOR Torres, Eliseo
TITLE Green Medicine: Traditional Mexican-American Herbal Remedies.
REPORT NO ISBN-9612008-0-4
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 64p.; For related document, see RC 015 788.
AVAILABLE FROM Nieves Press, P.O. Box 2205, Kingsville, TX 78363 ($4.95 plus postage).
PUB TYPE Reports - General (140)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cultural Background; *Folk Culture; *Health Services; *Hispanic American Culture; Medical Services; Medicine; *Mexican Americans; Physician Patient Relationship; Traditionalism; Vocabulary
IDENTIFIERS *Curanderismo; Folk Medicine; *Herbal Medicine; Herbs; Mexico; Traditional Healing

ABSTRACT

Traditional Mexican American herbal potions and remedies and their history are explained in an introductory book for the general reader. The importance of curanderismo, or green medicine, in Mexican and Mexican American cultures is explored. A brief history traces the herbal aspects of curanderismo through Mayan and Aztec cultures, the Spanish conquest, and Hippocrates' theory of humors, and finds contributions from many cultures intermixed with native lore. Other chapters discuss where to obtain herbs, preparation methods, and hazards of herb use. A glossary defines 33 substance effect terms. The largest part of the book contains information about 99 of the most widely used herbs arranged alphabetically by their English common name, with their Spanish name and cross-references provided. Entries include history of the herbs, medicinal uses, and preparation methods. A brief, annotated bibliography lists nine books about herbal medicine, Mexican remedies, and curanderismo. (LFL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Eliseo Torres

GREEN MEDICINE

Traditional Mexican-American Herbal Remedies

ED270279

RC015789

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Eliseo Torres

Quinto Press

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

NIEVES PRESS
Box 2205
Kingsville, Texas 78363

Copyright© by Eliseo Torres

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 83-062530

ISBN: 9612008-0-4

GREEN MEDICINE

Traditional Mexican-American Herbal Remedies

by Eliseo Torres

1983

Drawings by Clark Magruder

Foreword

There's a lot of interest in green medicine. I know, because I've been asked to take my "Traveling Medicine Show," a lecture I've prepared on Mexican-American herbal remedies, not just all over Texas, but to other states as well. And I've been asked to appear on various television shows and have been interviewed by newspaper reporters more often than I can easily remember. That's the sort of interest that the subject of herbal medicine inspires.

There's a lot of interest in reading about the subject,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

too. In fact, I have never appeared before a group without someone in the audience asking me if I have a book about herbal medicine that they might buy. That is why I decided to write this one: to serve as an introduction to the subject of green medicine, much as my "Traveling Medicine Show" does.

Oh, there are books about the subject, to be sure. Most of these, however, are written by scholars for scholars. They don't take into account the average person who just wants to get acquainted with what can be a very complicated subject. And those books that are more general are just that: too general. They include remedies from all over, not just those used by Mexican-Americans.

This is, of course, the portion of the subject that interests me. I am a Mexican-American who has always lived in Texas, where *curanderismo*, or folk healing, flourishes. I grew up with many of these remedies, and even though I went on to earn a doctorate in Education and become a Vice-President at Texas A&I University in Kingsville, I have not abandoned many of them, particularly the teas.

But even those that I, personally, do not use haven't ceased to fascinate me. It is my pleasure to share them all with you now – the green medicine which is part of curanderismo.

An Introduction

If I were to use the word "medicine," and ask you to picture something illustrating that word in your mind, what would you think of? Chances are you would think of a patent medicine you might find on the supermarket shelf: Alka Seltzer or Pepto Bismol or maybe a cold remedy like NyQuil. Then again, you might envision one of the little plastic bottles that pharmacists use for prescription drugs, the kind with the impossible-to-open childproof lids and the brightly colored capsules inside. Or maybe you'd think of the vaccination that you got before you took that trip abroad a few years back. In any case, if I were to use the word, "medicine," you probably would not conjure up the image of a plant.

Many modern medicines, however, come from plants. Most people know that digitalis comes from the Foxglove plant, which was used for heart ailments long before anyone had figured out why it worked. A lot of people know, too, that the chemical which is found in curare is a potent anesthetic. But let me give you another example which in many ways serves to illustrate one major premise of this book:

In the early 1600s, when the Peruvian Indians seemed to be the only people who were not dying of malaria, it was discovered that they were treating the illness with a tea made from the ground bark of the *Chinchona* tree. This "Peruvian Bark," as it later was called in Europe, contains the substance known as quinine.

Eventually, as often happens with remedies derived from plants, synthetic versions of quinine were developed and these superceded the botanical remedy. This is what usually happens and this is why the word "medicine" so infrequently makes us think of plants. But interestingly, in this case, the original remedy staged an unexpected comeback when a strain of malaria sur-

faced during the Vietnam war. This strain proved resistant to the synthetics that had been developed in the lab.

Was there anything that would cure this new strain? Yes. The original botanical remedy: Peruvian Bark – bark from the *Chinchona* tree.

What does this demonstrate? That the old remedies derived from plants do have a solid medical basis. And that they are sometimes better than the synthetics derived from them.

But the story of Peruvian Bark is illustrative in still another way. For instance, though malaria was the world's number one killer disease when a Jesuit first publicized the Peruvian Indian cure, the medical profession in Europe went out of its way to disprove the claims that were made for it.

A few physicians, for example, tested the bark with disastrous results. It was too dangerous to use, they concluded. Plus the remedy didn't have the sanction of appearing in a text by Galen – a famous physician of ancient Rome – who had codified his cures by writing them down in what had become the bible of the medical profession. Pretty soon someone came on the scene with a secret mixture that was supposed to be better than the remedy that the Indians used. Everyone ignored Peruvian Bark and chose this (probably much more expensive) medicine instead. After the death of the person who concocted it, its ingredients were revealed. And, of course, the main one was Peruvian Bark.

We can learn a lot from this one, not atypical, example.

But herbal cures today are being given more credence than they were, say, thirty years ago. I doubt that we'll return to the era when physicians routinely took courses in botany in order to study the *Materia Medica*, but, largely because of the mounting popularity of the

holistic movement – e.g., the theory of looking at a person's illness in the context of his beliefs, his lifestyle, his diet, and so on – herbal cures are once again coming into their own.

In the Mexican-American tradition, herbal cures – or green medicine, as it is sometimes called – have always been prominent. In large measure, these are used to treat minor ailments and are no more than inexpensive and readily accessible home remedies or, as they are called in Spanish, *remedios caseros*. But more importantly, herbal cures are part of an elaborate system of folk healing which Mexican-Americans call curanderismo.

You have only to look at the word to know – or at least to come up with a very good guess at – what it means. It derives from the Spanish verb, *curar*, to cure. And a practitioner of curanderismo – a healer – would be a curandero or a curandera. The former, if a man; the latter, if a woman. Interestingly, female healers are as prevalent as male.

But curanderos, like physicians, have specialties. There are *materias* or *espiritistas* – those who are mediums between this world and the beyond; there are *parteras*, or midwives; and *señoras*, who foretell the future by reading cards. Finally, and of greatest interest to us here, there are the *yerberas*, or herbalists. They are the ones who are most likely to employ green medicine to its fullest. Many of the vendors who bring herbs to the marketplaces in Mexico are, in fact, curanderos and *yerberas*.

Is curanderismo dying out? It does not seem to be. In many American cities far from Mexico – even Detroit and Chicago – there are enormous numbers of Mexican-Americans whose presence keeps it alive. In Chicago, for instance, there is even a shrine to a famous Mexican curandero, Niño Fidencio, and each year, people from Chicago and from other cities all over the United States journey to Espinazo, Mexico, where El Niño lived and

healed. One might say that, far from dying out, curanderismo thrives.

And those in formal medicine have begun to respect it, too. In one Denver mental health facility, for example, there is a curandera on the staff. But more and more, too, formal medicine – because of the aforementioned holistic or naturopathic swing – has begun to resemble curanderismo. For example, a 1983 article in a national women's magazine touted something called Therapeutic Touching as a medical breakthrough. A form of this has been practiced by curanderos for centuries! Another popular magazine, just a month later, had a page devoted to the medicinal value of oil extracted from Evening Primrose. As *Flor de San Juan*, Evening Primrose had long been part of curanderismo!

Some social scientists say that naturopathy is not merely a fad but a reasonable reaction against the technological brand of medicine we see everywhere around us: laser surgery, organ transplants, battery-powered limbs and even electronic mood equalizers. All of this is on the one hand, marvelous, and on the other, offputting in the extreme. Most people, after gasping in awe, cannot but say, "Wait a minute, what about us? As people?" Thus begins the search for something with deeper roots.

Well, the Mexican and Mexican-American cultures have, in fact, never let go of what other cultures have only begun to realize is of importance. This insistence on the human element is, probably, what has kept curanderismo from fading away through all these years.

It is true, of course, that some practices have changed. *Hueseros*, or bonesetters, for instance, have all but disappeared, replaced by physicians who are more effective at setting bones. But for other ailments, the formal practitioner is, well, too formal. He requires that an appointment be made. He requires a rather high cash payment, too. And in all likelihood, he doesn't speak Spanish. He might also be in another part of town. The typical curandero will have none of these drawbacks: he

will be, most likely, a neighbor or at least a trusted member of the patient's community. He will, therefore, speak Spanish. He will understand the social and psychological context in which the patient has developed the disease. And his cure – because he believes that it is dictated by God – will not be costly. In most cases, it will cost whatever the patient deems it to be worth.

The element of belief on the part of the patient will, of course, play a part in the cure. But even the stuffiest formal medical doctor cannot deny that it always does, whether the patient is treated in a *barrio* in San Antonio or at a shock trauma center somewhere. Expectation of cure is always important.

But some remedies will work just as well without the element of faith. Mexican housewives, for instance, used to scrape the mold off tortillas and feed it to those suffering from infection. How were they to know that the folk medicine they were offering would later be called penicillin? There are many common substances used medicinally – garlic, for example – which, after scientific study have been found to contain known healing agents.

But Mexicans and Mexican-Americans do not have to be convinced of this. They have for so long relied on herbal reliefs that, if anything, it seems odd not to rely on them. Evelyne Winter, who gathered a list of folk remedies from all over Mexico in the 1950s, reported, for example, that one of her informants had a hard time convincing a cab driver that she wasn't daft when she admitted to drinking tea just for the pleasure of drinking tea, rather than to effect a cure for some ailment or other!

Chamomile

Manzanilla

A Brief History

Two scholars from Pan American University studied curanderismo and concluded that it derived from or is influenced by six separate elements:

Judeo-Christian religious, symbols, and rituals

Early Arabic medicine and health practices

Medieval and later European witchcraft

Native American herbal lore

Modern Western beliefs about psychic phenomena

Modern medicine.

Of these six, some pertain to green medicine more clearly than others. An understanding of the native American herbal lore – that is, those remedies which the Indians of Mexico were practicing at the time of the Spanish conquest – and a brief examination of the reference to early Arabic medicine is sufficient to provide a simplified view of herbal healing, not just as it is practiced by the curanderos, but as it is handed down in Mexican-American families from one generation to the next.

Let us consider first the Aztec culture, which, more than any other Indian culture in Mexico, including the Mayan, Toltec, and Zapotec-Mixtec, influenced the herbal aspects of curanderismo.

At the time of the Spanish conquest, the Aztec civilization was remarkably advanced. There was socialized medicine, for example, including hospitals in various cities throughout the Aztec empire where injured warriors could be treated free of cost. There was great emphasis on sanitation, not merely from the personal

standpoint, but also regarding public sanitation as it affected public health. And there was ongoing botanical research for medical purposes.

The Huaxtepec garden, for example, devoted entirely to this purpose, had a seven mile circumference! Montezuma's gardens are described by Cervantes de Salazar in his 1554 book entitled "Dialogues," and here we learn that there were some two thousand species of trees, shrubs, and herbs for healing.

Unfortunately, the Spanish friars destroyed all of the Aztec's own written records of botanical successes and failures. The Aztecs, after all, were considered savages by these priests. What we do know of Aztec civilization was documented by men commissioned by more enlightened members of the government of Spain especially so that Aztec medical contributions would not be entirely lost!

It's no wonder, though, that few realize how advanced the Aztecs were. But even some who should know better tacitly insult the mighty Aztec nation. Consider the opinion inherent in this passage, for instance, from the pen of George Foster, a scholar writing in the *Journal of American Folklore*: The Aztec understanding of medicine, he writes, "was probably not greatly inferior to that of Spanish physicians." This offhand dismissal of Aztec achievement fails to take into account all of the things I mentioned earlier: the hospitals, the public sanitation, and even documented surgical successes!

This is not to say that the men who came to Mexico from Spain brought nothing. Some items they are known to have introduced include Chamomile, Onions, Garlic, Rosemary, Lemons, and Oranges, to name a few. Most importantly, however, they brought with them a medical theory which pervades curanderismo even today.

This is the theory of "the humors," first introduced

by Hippocrates, the Greek physician who is called the "father of medicine."

The theory of the humors presumes that there are four liquids in the human body: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. These are allied with the elements:

Blood, allied to air, is hot and moist

Phlegm, allied to water, is cold and moist

Yellow bile, allied to fire, is hot and dry

Black bile, allied to earth, is cold and dry.

Physical ailments, and even the various dispositions that people have, were said to be caused by the balance or proportion of the humors. Medicine, then, was an attempt to restore the balance. This theory of the humors, though, is not peculiar to curanderismo. It plays a large part in all traditional healing systems. While it originated with the Greeks and Romans, it was transmitted via the Arabs and thus reached Spain. In those days, it was part of formal – as opposed to folk – medicine, with all medical practice being a matter of restoring the body's fundamental harmony.

Formal medicine was very early entrenched in Mexico, by the way. A chair of medicine was established at the University of Mexico in 1580, and before then, curing was taught on a more casual basis at the Colegio de Santa Cruz in Tlaltelolco.

Mint

Hierba Buena

Where to Get the Herbs

Originally, herbal medicine was the only possible choice. There were no drugstores. If Aloe Vera was plentiful in a given area, it was chosen over Maguey, and vice versa. Availability is one reason there are so many alternatives listed for a given ailment – occasionally an illness struck and one had to cast about for an herb to cure it.

Eventually, botanical gardens – not necessarily on the scale of the Aztec gardens, but planned herbal plots nonetheless – were standard. Even today, some easy-to-grow herbs are cultivated, even in city apartments. Aloe Vera, for instance, flourishes as a houseplant, and Mint, Parsley, and similar herbs can be grown in the backyard or even in a window box.

And of course, herbs still grow in the wild.

The most common method of getting the herbs used in green medicine, however, is to buy them. Because many are used in cooking, they will often be found on the spice shelf of any supermarket. Other more esoteric herbs can be found in health food stores. Only occasionally – say in the case of powdered garlic – will the method of preparing herbs for sale alter their healing potential.

Those who live in cities near the Mexican border or in cities with a large Mexican-American population will usually find these herbs on sale in their neighborhoods. In most cases, they'll be bundled, wrapped in plastic, and tagged with the names in Spanish, just as they're given in italics in the glossary of this book. In these stores which sell herbs – *Yierberías*, *Hierberías*, or *Botánicas* – it is frequently possible to get advice about the use or preparation of a given herb, though the proprietors must take care not to violate the law by "practising medicine without a license." Usually you will be

told that "one often uses . . . " or "it is sometimes recommended that you . . .", much as I have done in this book.

In Mexico itself, most marketplaces or *mercados* will have a *yerbería* with bulk or prepacked herbs. In many areas, too, there is often an open air market with makeshift stalls where herbs gathered from the plains and mountains will be sold. And remember, often the vendors are curanderos who can give advice on the use of the herbs they sell.

Parsley

Perejil

Preparing Herbs for Use

Herbal remedies are most often taken as teas, in which case they are decocted or infused – terms to be explained later. Chamomile is probably the best known example of an herb used as a tea.

Occasionally, however, herbs are burned and either smoked or used as an incense. In the latter category, Juniper is often used. Many of the herbs which are smoked are illegal (Marijuana) or dangerous (Jimson Weed), but some are not: Eucalyptus or Mullein are two good examples.

Sometimes, too, the herbs are prepared in tincture or maceration. The former uses alcohol and the latter, water. Both of these methods seem to concentrate the qualities of the herb so prepared.

Or herbs can be made into a poultice or plaster to be applied directly to the skin. The Mustard plaster is probably the one with which most people are familiar.

But washes, too, are popular, either applied to the skin or used to rinse the mouth. A Rosemary wash, prepared exactly as the tea to be consumed is prepared, is probably the best example.

Usually when an herb comes with instructions that it be brewed as a tea, the method of preparation will be infusion or decoction. An infusion requires that boiling water be poured over the herb and that it then stand for at least five minutes in a covered container. A decoction requires that the herb be placed into water which is boiling and then be permitted to simmer (not boil) for at least five minutes. In either case, the herb is strained away and the resulting liquid is the tea, however it is used.

A maceration is made by placing the herb in water

and leaving it for at least ten hours, but often as long as a week. The constituents will separate and the thin top layer can be poured off. The resulting mixture, after the herb has been strained away, is taken in the appropriate dosage.

A tincture is prepared by mashing the herb and then soaking it in vodka or wine in a darkened place such as a closet. Usually a week is sufficient. Before the tincture is used, it is strained.

One general rule that should be followed no matter what mode of preparation is chosen is this: Never use aluminum or Teflon when preparing herbs. Glass is best, though steel is acceptable.

It is also wise to remember that dried herbs are stronger – sometimes even twice as strong – as freshly picked herbs.

It is very difficult to give exact dosages when dealing with herbs. The potency of the plant can change with the size of the plant, the soil in which it has grown, and a host of other variable elements. This, in fact, is one reason plant remedies were eventually synthesized in the lab: they could thus be made predictable. In general, however, a tablespoon of dried herb to a cup of liquid is a good starting point whatever the method of preparation. Herbs are potent. Just keep in mind the tiny amount of tea in an average teabag!

A Few Cautions

Any book about herbs is bound to be filled with cautions. Herbs are, after all, potent medicine. It's possible to overdose on herbs just as it is to overdose on street drugs.

In addition, many plants have poisonous parts. It may be perfectly safe to eat the leaves of a plant, for example, and deadly to eat the blossoms, or vice versa.

Or the plant may be perfectly safe if eaten fresh, but become poisonous as it wilts.

It's no wonder, then, that books about herbs have to contain a lot of warnings. In fact, to be on the safe side consider this statement an inflexible rule: *never* eat, chew, or drink tea brewed from any part of an unknown plant.

For example, some plants with poisonous berries are Mistletoe, Holly, and any variety of Ivy. Plants with poisonous leaves include Azalea, Lily of the Valley, and Elephant Ears. Plants with poisonous roots or bulbs include Iris, Daffodil, and Violet. Some plants have poisonous stems or vines or seeds. In this category are Potato, Tomato, Cherry, Rhubarb, and Hydrangea. Still others – Peach and Apricot, to name two – have poisonous pits.

Herbal medicine, obviously, can be far from benign!

The Brooklyn Botanic Garden in New York illustrated this very well one year by exhibiting a surprising array of plants which can cause harm. These ranged from English Ivy to Yew (the leaves and seeds of Yew, if eaten, can cause heart failure!).

And from an historic standpoint, the toxic characteristics of some plants have provoked some really inter-

esting speculation. For example, there's one theory that the Salem witches weren't witches after all, but had eaten an hallucinogenic substance similar to LSD. They are thought to have consumed St. Anthony's Fire, a fungus that grows on grain – especially on Rye.

Also, every now and then, dangerous ingredients are included in pre-packaged herbal remedies. For example, one supplier of "folk" medicine produced two cures for *empacho* called "Greta" and "Azarcón." Greta proved to have a base of lead monoxide and Azarcón was 90% lead tetroxide. Both were extremely toxic and were in regular use in a number of Mexican and Mexican-American homes! Though they were originally blended to cure *empacho*, which is similar to intestinal blockage, they were being used to treat headache and even menstrual disorders.

Lead monoxide – and Greta, when analyzed, proved to have 90 to 98 percent of this substance as its base – changes to lead chloride at stomach temperatures and, because of this, is readily absorbed into the bloodstream. The base metal of Azarcón did not convert to lead chloride and was less dangerous. But both, if ingested over long periods of time, would cause lead poisoning.

Lead poisoning can kill but more often those who survive are left severely retarded or handicapped in other ways.

It is thought that Greta and Azarcón became popular because they are similar in color to a remedy used by curanderos: Saffron or, in Spanish, *Azafrán*. The pre-packaged formulas seem to be attempts to copy the folk remedy for *empacho*, but alas, in this case, with disastrous or even lethal results.

Still another caution is not to rely on folk remedies and neglect standard medical treatment. Indeed, folk and formal medicine should complement each other. It is not unusual, nowadays, for a curandero to refer a patient to a licensed medical practitioner.

Important Terms

There are a lot of terms used to describe what a given substance does which are unfamiliar to the general reading public. Whenever I've used them in my glossary, I've defined them – at least on the first use. If you're planning to read other herbals, though (that's what glossaries describing herbs and their effects are often called), you'll be encountering them regularly and ought to memorize them:

Analgesic: Something that takes pain away, but does not cause loss of consciousness. An analgesic may be swallowed or rubbed on the skin or be used as a gargle. The effect categorizes it. Willow bark falls into this category.

Anaphrodisiac: Something that lessens sexual desire. Its opposite, of course, is the Aphrodisiac. Lettuce, for instance, is thought to be an anaphrodisiac.

Anesthetic: This can refer to a substance which causes loss of consciousness, but then again, it could also refer to one which doesn't. Oil of Cloves would be an example of the latter. An anesthetic kills sensation.

Anodyne: Can refer to a pain killer or merely to something that soothes. Aloe Vera, for example, could be an anodyne to someone with sunburn, or Papaya to someone who had been stung by a jellyfish.

Anthelmintic: This means that it eliminates worms. Pumpkin seeds are the most renowned anthelmintic.

Antidote: This is a substance which counteracts the effects of a poison.

Antiemetic: Something that stops vomiting and nausea. Mint, for instance, is antiemetic.

Antihydrotic: This is the opposite of a diaphoretic. It refers to a substance which dries up bodily fluids.

Antipyretic: Something that reduces fever.

Antiseptic: Something which stops the growth of micro-organisms (germs) and therefore is likely to prevent infection.

Antispasmodic: Stops muscle spasms and cramps. Valerian, for instance, is a known antispasmodic.

Aphrodisiac: Something that increases sexual desire.

Astringent: Something that is applied to contract pores.

Carminative: Also called an antiflatulent, this is something that gets rid of gas. Juniper berries are said to be carminative.

Cathartic: Causes bowels to evacuate. Another word for a laxative or purgative.

Coagulant: Causes clotting.

Demulcent: a substance which soothes an inflamed area. Aloe Vera, for example.

Diaphoretic: Something that increases sweating.

Disinfectant: An antiseptic or a substance used to kill germs.

Diuretic: Something that increases the flow of urine.

Emetic: A substance taken to induce vomiting.

Emollient: Something applied externally to soften and soothe.

Expectorant: A substance taken to expel mucous from the respiratory tract.

Germicide: An antiseptic or disinfectant – that is, something to kill germs.

Purgative: Something which causes the bowels to evacuate. Another term for a laxative or cathartic.

Restorative: Something taken to renew energy. Mint tea is thought to be a restorative, for instance.

Sedative: Something which calms and reduces nervousness.

Soporific: The opposite of a stimulant, a soporific induces sleep. Tea made from Orange blossoms, for example, is said to be a soporific, as is Chamomile.

Stimulant: A restorative.

Styptic: An astringent applied to stop bleeding. Lemon, for instance.

Tranquilizer: Something which calms. A sedative.

Unguent: A soothing or healing salve.

Vulnerary: A substance which promotes healing.

Sage

Salvia

A Glossary of Herbs

Aloe Vera *Zabila, Sabila*

The healing properties of Aloe Vera have been known for centuries — in fact, the first reference to it was made in 333 B.C. Aloe Vera, part of the same family as onion and garlic (not of cactus as is widely supposed because of the plant's spines), grows where there is no danger of freezing. In the United States, this means South Texas or Florida. Of course, Aloe Vera can also be cultivated as a houseplant.

Because Aloe Vera has become popular, it is possible to buy the extracted gel in bottles for use on cuts, burns, rashes, insect bites, acne, or as a wrinkle-preventative. This gel is usually liquified and often is stabilized so that it needs no refrigeration. Mexican-Americans mix the gel with water and drink it to treat arthritis, rheumatism, and stomach disorders. If you are using the plant itself rather than the bottled gel simply break off a leaf, slit it, squeeze out the gel that you find inside and apply. Aloe Vera can also be used as a meat tenderizer.

Anise *Anís Estrellado*

The seeds of this plant have a warm, spicy taste, and are often used in cooking. As a medicinal herb, however, a tea is made by boiling the Anise seeds in either water or milk. When prepared with milk, the tea is used to cure colic; when prepared with water, it is either consumed to cure a cough or used externally as an eyewash. An old Indian remedy advises travelers to chew Anise seeds to cure stomach gas.

Ash ***Fresno***

Ash is said to be a snake repellent, so effective that some people, when venturing into snake-infested areas, carried boughs of it with them. This rumor may have grown as the result of a mention in a 1597 book entitled "Gerard's Herbal," to wit: "serpents dare not be so bolde as to touch the morning and evening shadows of the (Ash) tree." In any case, Ash is said to be a remedy for snake bite (should carrying these boughs fail to ward the snakes away). To use in this manner, make a strong tea from the leaves and drink it if you are bitten. This tea is also supposedly a remedy for gout and rheumatism and can be taken to reduce fever. Ash is also said to have the ability to increase longevity, and, when used for this purpose, should be ingested each day. Ash is also rumored to be an aphrodisiac.

Basil (Sweet Basil) ***Albahaca***

Basil is an easy herb to grow. Its leaves and sometimes the flowering tips of the plant are used, either fresh or dried, to make a tea. This tea is supposed to have sedative and antispasmodic properties and therefore is often administered to those suffering from *susto* or shock. In a more concentrated form, Basil tea can be used as a gargle for sore throat or to heal sores in the mouth. The same tea can also be used externally on insect stings. A decoction of Basil, Honey, and Nutmeg is supposedly good to give to a mother immediately after childbirth to aid in expelling the afterbirth.

Bay ***Laurel***

Bay is a tree whose leaves are used to make a tea that is said to cure colic and diarrhea. Bay leaves are supposed to keep insects away and are often tucked into the band of a hat for this purpose. The oil from the berries can be extracted, too, and applied externally to muscles which are sore because of rheumatism or overexertion.

Bayberry ***Arbol de la Cera***

Swallowing a nickel-sized piece of the berry wax or chewing the dry berries will, it is said, quiet a cough or cure dysentery. A teaspoon of the liquid extracted from either the root or the bark has a similar use. It will supposedly ward off a cold if it is taken at the very first sign of the cold's onset. Still another method of treating or preventing a cold is to dry a piece of the root bark and powder it, then make a tea of the powder. The same powder can be used as a snuff to cure nasal congestion. Or the powder can be mixed with water to make an astringent mouthwash, especially good as a remedy for sore or bleeding gums.

Birthwort ***Moja de Guaco, Aristoloquia***

A tea made from Birthwort causes sweating (that is, is a diaphoretic) and, reportedly, is a stimulant. Large doses of this tea, however, can cause vomiting and stomach pains. Birthwort is also used in the form of a tincture, which means that its leaves are soaked in alcohol, then strained out and the resulting liquid saved to be applied as an antiseptic in cases of insect bite, especially if the insects are poisonous.

Blackberry ***Zarzamora***

The leaves are boiled for about ten minutes and the resulting liquid is used to rinse out the mouth if the gums are inflamed or if ulcers are present in the mouth. The same decoction, in lesser strength, is taken for diarrhea. The root bark is more potent than the leaves and is also used.

Borage ***Borraja***

This herb was known by the Moors as Abou-Rach, "the father of sweat." Indeed, Borage is said to purify

the body by increasing not only sweat but urine as well. Drinking a tea made of Borage is also alleged to keep the body cool, so it is sometimes used as a Summer drink. It is also offered to those suffering from fever for the same cooling effect. Borage tea is considered especially effective when the fever is attributable to Measles.

Because Borage increases the flow of urine, it is sometimes used to treat bladder infections. Scientific analysis of Borage shows that it contains potassium.

Bougainvillia ***Bugambilia***

A tea can be made from the flowers and used to combat a cough or sore throat.

Cactus – see Prickly Pear Cactus

Camomile – see Chamomile

Camphor ***Alcanfor***

The oil from the leaves of this tree is used as an anaphrodisiac, e.g., a substance which diminishes sexual desire. This oil is obtained through an elaborate process of steaming the branches, pressing the liquid produced into crystals, and then liquifying the crystals. The oil, then, is best purchased. Camphor is most often used to treat earache and as a rub on rheumatic joints or on the forehead in case of headache.

Carnation ***Clavel, Encarnación***

Soak fresh flower petals in water, adding sugar to thicken into a syrup. When strained, this syrup is used to combat indigestion, gas and bloating due to overeating. It is also used for cough.

Castor Bean ***Higuerilla, Palma Christi***

All parts of this plant, including the bean, which is the seed of the plant, are poisonous. Oil is extracted from the bean by pressing it, however, and serves as an excellent remedy for irritations of the gastro-intestinal tract and the genito-urinary system. All herbals advise that one never under any circumstances consume the seed. It would probably be best to purchase Castor oil if one wishes to use it.

Cayenne Pepper (Red Pepper) ***Cucurbita, Pepo, Pimentón***

A pinch of powdered peppers in drinking water will ward off *susto* or shock. Cayenne can also be applied directly to razor cuts as a styptic, e.g., a substance which stops bleeding. Cayenne pepper can also be brewed as a tea and consumed in cold weather, it is said, to keep the body warm. It is also shaken into shoes to keep the feet from getting cold.

Cedar ***Cedro***

A tea made from cedar is used in cases of malaria. Cedar, however, is also used in the rituals of curanderismo. In cases of *susto*, for example, the afflicted person is swept with branches of the cedar tree while the curandero recites the Apostle's Creed.

Century Plant (Mescal) ***Maguey, Agave***

This plant is a modern source of steroids. Some Maguey plants contain a substance similar to cortisone. The plant looks a great deal like Aloe Vera, though it does not have the spines. It is applied to wounds in a similar way. Occasionally the leaves are heated and the hot leaf used to induce abscesses to drain.

Chamomile ***Manzanilla***

Chamomile is a member of the thistle family. Its flowers as well as its leaves are used to make a tea which is taken to calm the nerves and to aid digestion. A stronger tea is consumed when fever is present. Because Chamomile has, despite its sweet odor, a bitter taste, it is often sweetened with honey and flavored with lemon. Chamomile tea, without additives, can be used externally as an eyewash. The steam from boiling Chamomile is also used to clear the nasal passages from the congestion of head colds. A tent is made by covering the head with a towel and letting the ends hang down over a pot of boiling water with Chamomile in it. The vapor that is trapped in the tent is then inhaled. This procedure is also said to cleanse pores and is sometimes recommended as a beauty treatment. Furthermore, when this decoction is cool, it supposedly makes a good after-shampoo rinse!

It is said, too, that those who wish to break the nicotine habit should chew fresh or dried Chamomile flowers when the urge for a cigarette strikes.

Cinnamon ***Canela***

An oil is released by bruising the bark, leaves, fruit, or root of the Cinnamon plant. This oil can be used as a rub on rheumatic aches. More commonly, strips of Cinnamon bark can be grated or bruised and then used to make a tea which is taken to aid digestion or stimulate the appetite. Cinnamon is also available in powdered form and can be used alone as a tea or to flavor other teas. Much lore surrounds Cinnamon, which reportedly was used in Egypt for embalming and in witchcraft. As a remnant of the latter, Cinnamon is said to be used as an incense in order to increase the sexual desire of women.

Citron Flowers ***Flor de Azahar***

The flowers from the orange or lemon tree can be picked fresh and brewed as a tea to cure insomnia.

Cloves ***Clavo***

One can chew a clove to kill the pain of a toothache or wrap it in cotton and place it in the ear to treat an earache. Oil of cloves can be rubbed on the gums to relieve pain, too. Cloves, when chewed, are said to be an aphrodisiac. A few drops of oil of Cloves in water is taken as an antiemetic, e.g., to stop vomiting.

Comfrey ***Consuelda, Sinfito***

The root and foliage of this plant contain a cell proliferant, and this is why the plant is commonly used to heal wounds. Comfrey, in fact, is considered the best of all healing herbs.

It is used in a number of ways. A decoction of Comfrey leaves is used as a disinfectant to bathe wounds and sores. Or, too, a maceration of leaves and roots can be applied either to heal a wound or to stop bleeding. Comfrey compresses will reportedly take the sting out of bites and burns, reduce swelling, and promote healing. While Comfrey is mostly used externally, one can drink the water in which the roots have been soaked, presumably to stop internal bleeding or to slow the menstrual flow when it seems too profuse.

Coriander ***Cilantro***

A tea made from the dried seeds is taken to cure nausea and diarrhea. Coriander is also used as an anaphrodisiac.

Cornsilk ***Barbas de Elote***

According to herbalists, the Cornsilk strands should be boiled and the resulting liquid drunk to treat bladder and kidney ailments. Cornsilk is said to relieve water retention and thus is given in the morning to children who wet the bed. This is rumored to "drain" them during the day and thus keep them dry at night. When used as a bedwetting remedy, Cornsilk is sometimes mixed with Agrimony. It also is supposed to relieve the painful urination sometimes associated with prostate problems.

Creosote Bush ***Gorbernadora***

Taken as a tea made from the leaves of the plant, Creosote Bush is thought to relieve kidney problems. More widely, the leaves are powdered and applied externally to disinfect wounds.

Cumin ***Comino***

This plant's seeds are boiled to make a mild and soothing tea for teething babies.

Dandelion ***Diente de León***

This humble and common plant has many medicinal uses. A decoction made of the whole plant is said to be a good liniment, while a tea made of the leaves and roots alone will act as a diuretic, thus cleansing the body of impurities. In this latter capacity, Dandelion tea is often used as a restorative after Hepatitis. In high doses, Dandelion tea is said to dissolve kidney and bladder stones. It is also allegedly an antipyretic, e.g., used to reduce fever. When the roots alone are ground and boiled, the resulting mixture is reputedly a laxative which aids the function of the liver.

But Dandelion has a myriad of external uses, too. The juice squeezed from any part of the plant, for instance, is applied to warts. A handful of the flowers boiled in water for half an hour and strained is said to make an excellent toilet water.

Delphinium (Larkspur) ***Espuela de Caballero, Delfinio***

The flowers and seeds are ground and soaked in either alcohol or vinegar. This mixture has been used externally to attack body lice, particularly pubic lice. It should be applied after a hot bath for four or five days in a row. It does not always kill the eggs, so the person using it should keep an eye out for reinfestation. It also can be used on pets.

Elder ***Saúco***

The flowers are the mildest and safest part of the plant and inhaling the steam as the flowers are boiling is said to be good for the skin, as is applying the water in which Elder flowers have soaked overnight. A tea made from the bark is diuretic and a laxative, and thus is said to be good to consume in cases of water retention. The same tea promotes sweating and is often given to those with fever. Fresh Elder leaves, crushed and mixed with Olive Oil, can be applied to hemorrhoids for relief. The blue Elderberries can be eaten, but the red are toxic.

Elm ***Olmo***

Herbalists advise that the inner bark be dried, then soaked in cold water, then brought to a boil for ten minutes. The resulting fluid can be drunk to relieve edema, or swelling due to water retention. This Elm mixture has also reportedly been taken to clear the complexion. The liquid can also be used externally to

soak compresses which are then applied to skin eruptions.

Eucalyptus ***Eucalipto***

The leaves are used as a tea to promote digestion, but more often they are boiled and the steam inhaled to relieve congestion and cough. Asthma sufferers can smoke dried Eucalyptus leaves for relief.

Evening Primrose ***Flor de San Juan, Enotera***

The oil from the flowers, according to a recent article in *Redbook* magazine, can be taken to combat the battery of symptoms known as "premenstrual syndrome," e.g., bloating, irritability, headache. The same article reported that Evening Primrose oil had been touted in the early 1700s as "The King's Cure All."

Evening Primrose oil has also been used to treat eczema and British studies have shown a reduction in the scaly, itchy skin eruptions associated with that disease. It is also being tested as a treatment for alcoholism. The active ingredient in Evening Primrose oil is a chemical called gamma-linolenic acid.

Fennel ***Hinojo***

The leaves, seeds, stems and roots are used to make a tea said to stimulate appetite and act as a diuretic. Dry Fennel seeds, too, when cooked in a cupful of milk and drunk as hot as possible, are said to eliminate gas. The same mixture is supposed to be soothing to flu sufferers, too. The seeds boiled in water are said to give off steam that is inhaled for migraine headache relief. In addition, Fennel is thought to have magical powers. Sprigs of it are still hung about the home to rid it of evil spirits.

Fig ***Higuera***

Cooked figs are eaten as a laxative and to cure sore throat and cough. The figs are also given to children with scarlet fever or chicken pox. Externally, a cooked fig can be split open and applied hot to sores and boils. In addition, the milky sap which issues from the snapped branch of a fig tree can be applied to corns and warts in order to remove them.

Flax ***Grano de Lino***

The Flaxseed, also called Linseed, is boiled in water to make a disinfectant useful for bathing sores and rinsing out the mouth. Flaxseed is also said to be useful as a poultice or plaster which is applied to boils, abscesses or even tumors. Modern herbals caution not to use boiled Linseed oil from the hardware store!

Garlic ***Ajo***

This is another revered medicinal plant, and it is said to cure a multiplicity of ills. It should be used fresh, as it loses its potency when processed into powder. When a clove of Garlic is crushed and mixed with Olive Oil, for instance, it serves as an unguent to be used on burns and abrasions. A clove peeled and wrapped in gauze can be inserted into the ear to cure earache. And three to four peeled cloves soaked in a pint of brandy which has been kept in a dark place, say, a closet, for about fourteen days will, when strained, serve as an effective cough syrup for asthma sufferers and those troubled by coughing spells.

The efficacy of Garlic has been studied and various surprising facts about it have emerged. One German study, for example, says that Garlic helps to break up cholesterol in the blood vessels, thereby reducing the risk of heart attack. A Japanese study claims that Garlic rids the system of various poisons such as lead or

mercury. A Russian study is said to have shown that application of a Garlic preparation retarded tumor growth. There have even been studies (such as one reported in "Science" magazine in 1957) where cancer-ridden mice who ate Garlic were observed to live longer than those who did not eat it.

There is no question that Garlic has antibacterial and Anti-inflammatory properties. For years, it has been mashed and mixed with honey or milk or softened bread and then applied to wounds – even scorpion bites!

Garlic is also made into a tea which is used to treat stomach ulcers as well as liver and kidney disorders. One herbal advises that three cloves eaten and washed down with a glass of milk will prevent tuberculosis.

Two additional practices involve crushing Garlic and mixing it with brown sugar to use as a cough syrup in cases of whooping cough and the practice of eating Garlic cloves whole to prevent scurvy. Another external use is to mash Garlic cloves into a paste and, using honey to bind the cloves, apply it to the scalp to cure dandruff.

Geranium *Geranio*

A tea made from the leaves is a good aromatic body wash. This tea is high in calcium and is often taken as a dietary supplement. It is also used as a gargle for sore throat.

Ginger *Jengibre*

The leaves as well as the root of this plant can be used both externally and internally. Made into a tea, Ginger relieves the achy feeling often associated with the onset of flu. The same tea will reportedly relieve nausea, too. Ginger is also thought by some to be an aphrodisiac. In a more pedestrian vein, water with

powdered Ginger in it is said to be an excellent foot soak.

Goldenrod ***Mariquilla***

Dried and powdered leaves as well as the flowering tips of this plant make a tea that is said to combat arthritis and aid those with diabetes. Goldenrod tea is also rumored to be an effective diuretic and is used to reduce water retention and even to break up kidney stones.

Guava ***Guayabo***

The Aztecs used Guava extract externally, as an astringent. It is also listed in some herbals as an anthelmintic, meaning that it is used to destroy intestinal worms.

Horehound ***Marrubio Concha***

A renowned expectorant, a bitter tea is made from Horehound by pouring boiling water over a handful of the leaves of the plant. This is allowed to stand for ten minutes, and the resulting fluid, when consumed, is said to stimulate menstruation, aid digestion, and reduce fever. Honey and lemon are the recommended sweetening agents. Years ago in England a beer was made from Horehound. In large doses, Horehound tea is used to expel intestinal worms.

Horsetail ***Cañutillo Del Llano***

A concentrated decoction of this plant is useful as a lotion for washing sores and abscesses, but it can also be used to keep the feet from sweating. It contains acotanic acid, which stops secretions, thus it is thought to stop internal bleeding when made into a tea and

consumed. It is taken in this way when menstruation is too profuse or when the bladder or intestines are inflamed. Horsetail is frequently used to remedy incontinence.

Houseleek (Stonecrop) ***Siempreviva***

The leaves can be plucked from this plant and eaten to soothe intestinal irritation, but, more often, the juice from the plant's leaves is used externally, either in a poultice or rubbed directly on sores, burns, warts, or stings. Cold Houseleek poultices are applied to the head to cure headache and hot Houseleek poultices are used to relieve the pain and itching of hemorrhoids. The fresh leaf of a Houseleek, it is said, will arrest bleeding when applied directly to a wound.

Huisache ***Huisache***

The leaves and bark are commonly brewed as a tea when a diuretic is needed. The same mixture can be used as a gargle for sore throat, or applied externally as an astringent.

The Huisache leaves, bark and root, when pulverized and boiled into a concentrate, are sometimes taken for cough. When brewed this way, herbalists advise that the dosage is critical.

The fresh Huisache flowers, picked in the Spring, can be boiled to create vapors. These are inhaled, using the method outlined earlier (see Chamomile).

Indigo ***Añil, Jiguilete***

A tea made from the leaves is used to treat empacho and even epilepsy. Externally, the leaves are used as a poultice on the forehead to relieve headache. In addition,

Indigo seeds can be ground and the powder dusted over the body to destroy lice and to heal sores.

Jimson Weed (Loco Weed) ***Estramonio, Toloache***

This was used as a wash on horses and cows, reportedly to keep them from straying. Humans use the smoke from the burning leaves of the plant to control the spasms associated with asthma. The same smoke also dries up nasal secretions and is helpful in cases of sinusitis. The fresh Jimson Weed plant makes a good poultice for painful joints. People with hot tubs drop the leaves into the water for this purpose (though the same can be done by soaking them in the bathtub).

Jimson Weed should never be taken internally. It can cause coma, convulsions, and death.

Juniper ***Enebro, Tascate***

Tea from the berries is thought to be both an aphrodisiac and a means of birth control (a formidable combination!) More reliably, both the leaves and berries are diuretic and used to fight water retention. The berries alone, crushed and soaked in a covered container of water, yield a liquid often used to treat cystitis and urethritis. Juniper is also used in tincture form for the same purpose. To make the tincture, macerate the berries and soak them in white wine for a week, then strain to remove all residue and keep the remaining liquid. These berries are also used to flavor gin.

Juniper berries can be used fresh or dried. They are often chewed to eliminate gas. In addition, they are often combined with the leaves and burned, both to combat bad odors and, legend says, evil influences as well. A sprig of Juniper kept in a vase is said to guard the occupants of the house against evil, too.

Lady Slipper ***Flores de Belin***

Internal use is sometimes made of this plant, but this is risky since it has toxic properties. More commonly, it is used to remedy ingrown toenail. To effect this cure, mash the fresh flowers and place them on the toenail, where they should remain overnight. This procedure should be continued until the toenail grows properly.

Larkspur – see Delphinium

Lavender ***Espliego, Alhucema***

Internally, the flowers are brewed into a tea and taken as a sedative or an antispasmodic (the plant is classified as an antiemetic, which means it will stop vomiting). It is reputedly a cure for menstrual cramps and, as one old text puts it, "serves as a remedy for giddiness." Externally, the same tea can be used as a footbath or applied to the body as a liniment which is said to stimulate the nerve endings. Still another external remedy that is often reported is that a few drops of essence of Lavender on the forehead will cure headache and relieve depression.

But Lavender has proven cosmetic uses, too. An excellent lotion can be made by mixing macerated Lavender blossoms and olive oil until the mixture smells good.

Lemon ***Limón***

Powdered bark from the root of this plant can be made into a tea and used to induce sweating and break a fever. More commonly, however, the fruit – which is certainly more readily available – is used. The juice of the lemon is known to be an antiseptic. Lemon also serves as a styptic. Half a lemon applied to a razor cut

will staunch the bleeding, though the cut will sting as a result.

But Lemon is rumored to cure a great many ills. For instance, legend has it that any painful spots on the body should be rubbed with half a lemon to ease the pain. To relieve a headache, an old remedy is to cut a lemon in half and apply a section to each temple. And, probably because the citric acid in Lemon has a drying effect, it is used on corns and to soften rough skin spots. Of course, Lemon, especially when mixed with honey, is best known as a remedy for the common cold.

Lettuce ***Lechuga***

Tea can be brewed from the leaves to relieve constipation and calm the nerves. It is often taken at bedtime to insure sound sleep. Lettuce tea is also said to quell sexual desire. Wild lettuce is also dried and smoked for its sedative effect. The plant contains arsenic, but in small, harmless quantities.

Lily of the Valley ***Lirio de Los Valles***

The dried flowers of Lily of the Valley were often powdered and used as a snuff. Many, however, preferred to drink an infusion of the flowers and occasionally the root. The resulting tea is said to be a cardiac tonic.

Indeed, Lily of the Valley acts very much like Digitalis and care should be taken not to drink too much. But Lily of the Valley can be toxic even in small quantities. One legend has it that a child died within minutes of drinking the water from a glass in which a sprig of Lily of the Valley had been placed!

Linden Flower ***Flor de Tila***

Tea made from this flower is used as a tranquilizer and is taken as a soporific at bedtime.

Magnolia ***Flor de Corazón, Magnolia***

Those who have had heart attacks were advised by some herbalists to drink a tea made from the petals of the Magnolia blossoms. Indeed, the Aztec name for Magnolia was Yoloxochitl, which means "heart flower." The bark of the Magnolia tree, when powdered and soaked in water, has been shown to be a heart stimulant. But, in addition to this use, the Aztecs prepared a tonic with the dried blossoms to treat mental stupor and senility.

Mallow ***Malva***

The flowers of this plant can be softened in water and then chewed to relieve the pain of a toothache. The flowers can also be brewed by infusion into a mouthwash which is said to soothe irritations of the mouth and gums.

The fresh or dried leaves, too, can be used, either to make a poultice or brewed to make a tea. In the latter form, Mallow soothes the mucous membranes and is therefore considered a good remedy for sore throat or even sore tonsils. Some claim Mallow tea will calm intestinal irritation.

Externally, Mallow tea is used as a body wash, particularly on children, to reduce fever. However it is used, it should be washed well because dogs tend to choose the Mallow plant to mark their territory.

Marigold ***Caléndula***

The whole plant can be used in tincture and applied to sores. An infusion of the fresh or dried flowers, allowed to stand for ten to fifteen minutes can, similarly, be used as a lotion. A decoction made from the root can be drunk as a tea to relieve gout and rheumatism. It is also said that applying the leaves of a Marigold plant to calluses will soften them and eventually make them disappear.

Marijuana ***Marijuana***

In tincture, Marijuana is rubbed on rheumatic limbs. Brewed as a tea, it is taken to quiet coughing spells (especially when mixed with Horehound). In fact, a weak Marijuana tea is given to colicky babies.

Externally, a poultice made of the leaves and roots of the plant is said to have a great deal of drawing power and therefore is applied to carbuncles and boils.

When smoked, Marijuana is an intoxicant. Studies have shown, however, that smoking Marijuana may be of benefit to those suffering from glaucoma as it tends to reduce ocular pressure. Because of the plant's illegality, however, it is not often used for medicinal purposes.

Marjoram (Sweet Marjoram) ***Mejorana***

As a tea, Marjoram cures stomachache. A stronger decoction can be brewed and a cloth soaked in the mixture. This cloth is then wrapped around the throat of a person suffering from sore throat to provide relief.

Mesquite ***Mesquite***

The sap of this tree is dissolved in water and taken as a cure for dysentery. In addition, a tea infused from the seeds and bark can be consumed to combat irritations of the digestive tract. A decoction made from the leaves can be used to wash inflamed eyes.

Mint ***Hierba Buena***

There are various types of easily grown mint, such as spearmint or peppermint. All are antiemetic. A tea made of any of these is said to provide relief from stomachache and nausea, but can also be taken to aid digestion. Mint tea is said to provide a mild stimulant

as well, and thus is consumed to give energy and restore the spirits.

Monkshood (Wolfsbane) ***Acónito***

This plant is poisonous if taken internally. The seeds, however, can be mashed and combined with lard or suet to be applied to abcsesses or boils. The dried roots have been used to poison the tips of arrowheads. This plant, reportedly, is used in witchcraft.

Mugwort ***Artemisa, Zizim, Zitzim***

The heads of the flowers and dried leaves of this plant are used to make a tea that is said to remedy female disorders. It supposedly will combat menopausal difficulties and irregular or painful menstruation. A woman should start drinking the tea ten to twelve days before menstruation is to begin and then stop once her flow starts. Pregnant and nursing women, however, are advised to refrain from using it.

There are other uses for Mugwort, however. An infusion of the whole plant is taken to stimulate appetite. In addition, the dried flowers are ground into a powder and used for colic as well as to rid the body of intestinal worms. The plant is also said to have magical properties and, when carried, is rumored to ward away danger. It is said that a leaf stuck in the nostril will cure a headache. Another legend advises that if one sleeps on a pillow stuffed with Mugwort, one will dream of the future.

Mulberry ***Corteza de Mora***

The bark makes an effective mouthwash when soaked in water for 24 hours.

Mullein (Great Mullein) ***Gordolobo***

This herb has been used since the middle ages. It is a noted remedy for bronchial complaints and was often fed to winded horses. Mullein has been used in various ways and to various ends. For example, smoking dried Mullein leaves is said to be a remedy for the symptoms of asthma. A half teaspoon of Mullein root soaked in a quarter cup of water is supposed to cure bedwetting. The flowers of the Mullein plant, soaked in hot Olive Oil for several hours, will, it is said, provide eardrop oil to cure an earache. The leaves and flowers – particularly the latter – are brewed in milk to make a tea for bronchial ailments. A stronger tea is said to be a sedative. In either case, when making tea, be sure to filter the coarse hairs that the flowers leave behind as these can irritate the throat. Finally, Mullein can be used as a poultice for wounds, cuts, hemorrhoids and even gout.

Musk Mallow

This is reportedly an antidote to snake venom and Indians in Mexico are said to wear the seeds of Musk Mallow in little bags around their necks when they go into a snake-infested area to work. If bitten, the poison is drawn from the wound and then the Musk Mallow seeds, chewed until pulpy, are placed directly over the wound.

Mustard ***Mostaza***

The seeds are ground and mixed with lard to make a poultice to be applied wherever there is pain: the feet, the back, the chest. This allegedly cures rheumatic and arthritic pain. But Mustard powder can also be mixed with water for footbaths which are said to relieve the symptoms of colds and flu. The best known use, however, is the plaster. To make a Mustard plaster, make a paste of ground Mustard seed or Mustard powder, flour and water. Wrap the paste in a damp towel or flannel cloth

and rest it over the back or chest of the afflicted person. As for internal use, it is said that those who suffer from a weak stomach can strengthen it by eating Mustard seeds.

Nettle (Stinging Nettle) ***Ortiga Mayor***

The Aztecs used this plant to reduce hemorrhage and it is still used this way today. For example, in cases of nosebleed, a bit of moistened cotton is dipped in juice extracted by mashing the Nettle plant and then placing it in the nostril. But Nettle is also used internally to control excessive menstrual bleeding or even internal bleeding such as the bleeding one associates with ulcers. Nettle tea is also thought to control bedwetting.

The Nettle plant also has numerous other uses which have been recorded over the years. Cosmetically, the seeds can be soaked for twenty minutes in water and the water then used as a final rinse after shampooing. This will, indeed, impart a gloss to the hair. Horses used to be rubbed with the mixture to give them glossy coats. Chopped Nettle leaves, too, were once fed to horses to give them more spirit. And mixed with mash, Nettle supposedly enabled hens to lay more eggs. Nettle is also mentioned in some old texts as an aphrodisiac.

Nutmeg ***Nuez Moscada***

The nuts are ground into a powder and boiled to produce a tea which remedies indigestion and gas. Sometimes, too, the fleshy part of the fruit is chewed or preserved to be eaten as candy. This candy is also said to be a good remedy for indigestion. In large quantities, however, Nutmeg can cause nausea, vomiting, and even stupor.

Oak ***Encino***

The leaves can be chewed, removed from the mouth, and applied to bites to stop itching. More often, however, the bark is dried, chopped and boiled for ten minutes, with the resulting liquid used as a gargle, douche or enema. It can also be brewed as a tea, and when taken this way, is said to cure diarrhea and also act as a diuretic. Oak leaves, when ground, are also used as a snuff.

Olive ***Olivo***

The oil from crushed olives is used to treat cough. It is mixed with egg white to make a soothing ointment that is applied to the neck and chest, or is taken by itself, orally, a teaspoon at a time.

A spoonful of olive oil is also said to protect against intoxication. Modern studies have shown that this might indeed be so. The oil coats the stomach wall, inhibiting the penetration of the alcohol and at the same time, enabling enzymes to break the alcohol down before it can get into the bloodstream.

A spoonful of olive oil is also said to give high energy, much as a spoonful of honey does, by elevating the blood sugar. In addition, the leaves of the Olive tree, and occasionally the bark, can be boiled to make a tea taken to rid the body of intestinal worms or to use as a wash for body sores and rashes.

Onion ***Cebolla***

Raw Onion is eaten to treat anemia, exhaustion, bronchial complaints and gas. Onion that has been chopped and cooked in oil is fed to children to prevent scarlet fever and diptheria. Crushed and decocted with honey, Onion is taken as a tea for cough or sore throat.

But Onion has a number of recorded external uses, too. It can be applied grated or in slices as a poultice over burns, bites, wounds or even over joints which are troubled by rheumatic or arthritic pain. A roasted onion has great drawing power and is often applied, split and still hot, to boils. Mixed with hot vinegar, Onion is used to make a chest compress to provide relief for those suffering from pneumonia.

Orange (Seville Orange) ***Naranjo***

A tea made from the leaves of the bitter Orange *(Naranja Amarga)* is taken to aid digestion and, in stronger doses, to cure insomnia. The fresh leaves, picked and boiled until the water is halved in volume, is also given to epileptics. Tea made from the peel and flowers is somewhat more potent and is taken to calm the nerves and, again, to combat sleeplessness. Too much, however, can have a toxic effect. Tea made from the bark of the bitter Orange tree is taken several days in a row to stimulate the appetite.

Oregano (Wild Marjoram) ***Orégano***

The leaves and heads of the flowers are dried and used to brew a tea taken to regulate menstruation, relieve premenstrual tension and cramps. This tea is also said to loosen phlegm and soothe a sore throat and so is given to those with bronchitis. It is also used as a gargle. An even stronger Oregano tea consumed before meals will supposedly expel intestinal worms.

Papaya ***Papaya***

Papaya has been analyzed and is known to contain a soothing and healing enzyme, papain. The Indians of Mexico long ago discovered its properties and laid strips of the fruit upon infected wounds to cure them. Papaya is also applied in this way to jellyfish stings. In fact, a

well-known meat tenderizer which contains dried papaya is often taken to the beach for this purpose. Papaya can be eaten, too, to cure indigestion. Its juice is soothing to those suffering from stomach ulcers.

Parsley ***Perejil***

This herb, too, has many and varied uses. Some herbalists, in fact, claim that regular consumption of a Parsley tea will cure alcoholism. Still others say that it will dissolve gallstones when taken daily. More commonly, an infusion of fresh leaves makes a tea which is used to relieve indigestion or menstrual cramps. One less widely known use of Parsley is to make a tea of crushed seeds to dry up a mother's milk after her baby is weaned. Externally, mashed Parsley leaves are applied to cuts, bleeding wounds, or insect stings. Similarly, the leaves can be packed in the nostril to stop nosebleed. The most controversial claim for Parsley is that, eaten fresh each day, it will prevent cancer.

Pecan ***Nogal***

The leaves are soaked in water overnight and the water is then strained and taken by people who are anemic. This is said to enrich their blood.

Pennyroyal ***Poleo de Casa***

A tea made of the dry leaves and flowering tips of the plant is reportedly a cold remedy, probably because it is diaphoretic. Externally, it is applied to insect bites to stop itching and promote healing.

Pepper ***Pirul***

Boughs from this tree are said to have a magical effect. They are passed over the body of someone suffer-

ing from *susto* while the person performing the cure prays. But the effect of the Pepper tree is also thought to be negative. It is said that those living in a house shaded by a Pepper tree will be sterile, for instance. Of course, one of the most famous curanderos of all time, Niño Fidencio, sat under a Pepper tree in the town of Espinazo to do much of his healing. The tree, El Pirulito, is much honored today and even has its own attendant.

Pine *Pino*

Juice extracted from Pine makes an excellent cough syrup as does Pine-sprig honey. These are also recommended treatments for bronchitis and chest infections. Externally, water in which Pine needles have soaked overnight makes a bracing and some say energy-restoring bath water.

Potato *Papa*

The raw juice can be taken for relief from stomachache, diarrhea, and fluid retention. Slices of raw potato, too, can be placed on the temples to cure headache. Most often, however, grated potato is applied in poultice form to puffy eyelids, cracked skin, sunburn, or insect bites.

Prickly Pear Cactus *Nopal*

The Aztecs used the juice to treat burns, making it into a paste with egg yolks and honey. They also mixed it with Maguey and drank it as a cure for hepatitis. The fruit of the Prickly Pear Cactus, called the *tuna*, was also sliced in half and heated and placed on abscesses to draw out infection.

Pumpkin ***Calabaza***

About a hundred Pumpkin seeds *(Pepitas)* are peeled and eaten raw to cure tapeworm. This should be done on an empty stomach. Extract can also be purchased for this purpose. Externally, Pumpkin pulp can also be used as a cold poultice for headache and burns.

Red Pepper – see Cayenne Pepper

Rose of Castille ***Rosa de Castilla***

A tea made from the flowers is given to children suffering from colic and intestinal inflammation. It serves as a laxative. When cool it is also used as a wash for inflamed eyes.

Rosemary ***Romero***

This is another herb which is used as a cure for a wide variety of ills. The leaves are used often to make a tea to aid digestion, but it is also supposed to increase memory. The same tea, cooled, can be used as a skin wash to prevent wrinkles and blemishes and to erase freckles. Rosemary tea is also considered an excellent mouthwash and breath freshener. A very optimistic use is to rub a tincture of Rosemary onto the head each day to prevent baldness. More reliably, the same tincture can be rubbed on painful joints and muscles.

Rue ***Ruda***

Rue tea, taken in small amounts, will stimulate menstruation. The same tea, again, in a small dose (one cup maximum) is recommended variously for relief from congestion, headache, nausea, fainting spells, difficult breathing, and stomach cramps. The tea, most herbals agree, should be taken without sugar.

Externally, Rue tea can be used as a wash to kill body lice.

One book touts Rue as a remedy for snakebite. It suggests that the plant be soaked in beer, then the beer be applied directly to the bite. It further advises that the remainder be consumed.

For earache, a stem of Rue wrapped in cotton and placed in the ear is said to erase the pain.

Sage ***Salvia***

Sage is another of the wonder herbs, used for diverse ailments. It is best, most herbals advise, to use Sage by itself, rather than in combination with other herbs.

Some of the medicinal uses include substitution of a Sage tea for coffee to aid those with digestive problems. Then, too, when added to a baby's formula, Sage is said to fight diarrhea. It is also said to prevent tuberculosis, in children especially.

Sage, because it dries up all secretions, also provides a good tea for nursing women who wish to wean. In addition to depleting the milk supply, Sage will slow the flow of mucous, perspiration, and saliva.

Sage tea is said to work against depression, too. When sage tea is cooled it makes an effective mouthwash, often used to cure gum disease. The same tea is antiseptic and destroys bacteria, thus providing a good soak for wounds.

Some lesser known uses are that Sage can be smoked by asthmatics for relief, and that a Sage leaf chewed before eating foods that tend "not to agree with" one will permit the user to eat the meal without ill effect.

Sarsaparilla *Zarzaparrilla*

The root is boiled in water and the resulting tea is then taken to purify the blood, thereby preventing or curing skin diseases and eruptions. The roots yield sarapogenin, which acts much like progesterone. The leaves and berries of the Sarsaparilla plant are said to be a good antidote for poisons. Some herbals list this tea as a cure for syphilis as well as for hives.

Sea Holly *Yerba de Sapo*

The whole plant is brewed into a tea, preferably a decoction, which is taken to relieve water retention. The tea stimulates uterine contractions, too, and is often taken by women about to give birth, presumably to speed the delivery. Sea Holly, because of its effect of the uterus, is also thought to be an aphrodisiac.

Seville Orange – see Orange

Shaggy-Leafed Toadflax – see Toadflax

Sorrell *Acedera*

Taken as a tea, Sorrell is a laxative. Cooked, it is used as a poultice which will bring boils to a head.

Stinging Nettle – see Nettle

Stonecrop – see Houseleek

Sunflower *Girasol*

A tincture is made to cure colds by mashing the

stems and soaking them in alcohol for a month. The seeds, which are eaten, are said to have varied effects. Some eat them for potency. Another rumored use is to decrease fertility. Because they allegedly contract the uterus, Sunflower seeds are also said to cause abortion.

Sweet Basil – see Basil

Thyme *Tomillo*

Thyme is thought to induce abortion. Less dramatically, a tea made of thyme is said to eliminate phlegm and post-nasal drip. Thyme tea is thought to have a different effect depending upon its temperature, and thus a cold Thyme tea is taken for headache relief, while a hot brew is consumed to induce sleep and to ward off nightmares. Hot Thyme tea is reportedly good to use as a remedy for stomach cramps and diarrhea.

But Thyme can be used externally, too, and, in fact, has been found to contain an antibacterial substance. One can use it on sores and insect bites, or brew a very strong solution to fumigate and to repel insects. Oil of Thyme has strong germicidal qualities.

Toadflax *Hojas de Callito, Linaria*

Press the flowering stems until liquid is extracted and use as a mouthwash, one herbal advises. Another suggests that you brew a tea from the stems when the plant is in flower and use it as a liver stimulant and hepatic remedy.

Valerian *Raíz de Valeriana*

Only the root of this potent plant is used. Its results are rumored to be varied and include inducing abortion, serving as an anaphrodisiac, and curing alcoho-

lism. One proven effect is that it is a powerful sedative and antispasmodic.

The root is ground into a powder and mixed with water – never boiled – and taken for nervousness, cramps or insomnia. Valerian should not be used regularly because it can cause depression. Cats love Valerian powder and will react to it much as they do to Catnip. The fresh root is less odorific than the dried, though the latter is more frequently available. Valerian powder can also be applied dry to sores and abscesses.

Vanilla ***Vainilla***

Sweetened and mixed with water or milk, Vanilla is variously listed as an aid to digestion, a stimulant, an antispasmodic, and an emmenagogue, e.g. a substance that stimulates menstrual flow.

Vervain ***Verbena***

Tea made from the leaves of Vervain reduces fever. The same tea rubbed on the scalp is said to promote hair growth.

Violet ***Violeta***

A mild decoction is taken for headache or as a sedative or even a remedy for cough or cold. The fresh leaves, when crushed, are also applied to crackled nipples or gouty limbs. A decoction made of Violet root is emetic, meaning that it can be used to induce vomiting when that is desired – when a poison has been ingested, for instance. Sometimes a candy is made from Violets.

Walnut ***Nogal***

A decoction made of the leaves of this tree is a disinfectant and can be applied to wounds and sores. It is also said to have insect-repelling capabilities and is used to bathe humans and pets.

Watercress ***Berro***

This herb is always used fresh and uncooked, though it should be washed well since it tends to attract dogs who use it to mark their territories. Chewed, Watercress will reduce bloating and will stop gums from bleeding. Crushed, the extract thus produced is consumed for ailments as diverse as diabetes, anemia and bronchitis. Watercress, which contains manganese, is said to lower blood sugar.

Wild Marjoram – see Oregano

Willow ***Jara, Jarita, Sauce***

The bark contains salycin, which is like aspirin. The powder from ground willow bark is taken in capsules or mixed with wine to reduce fever or to relieve the pain of headache, rheumatism or arthritis. Tea made from Willow bark is also used to combat bladder infections. Boiled with borax or boric acid, Willow is a good antiseptic wash.

Yam Bean

The seeds in tincture are applied to the head to cure dandruff.

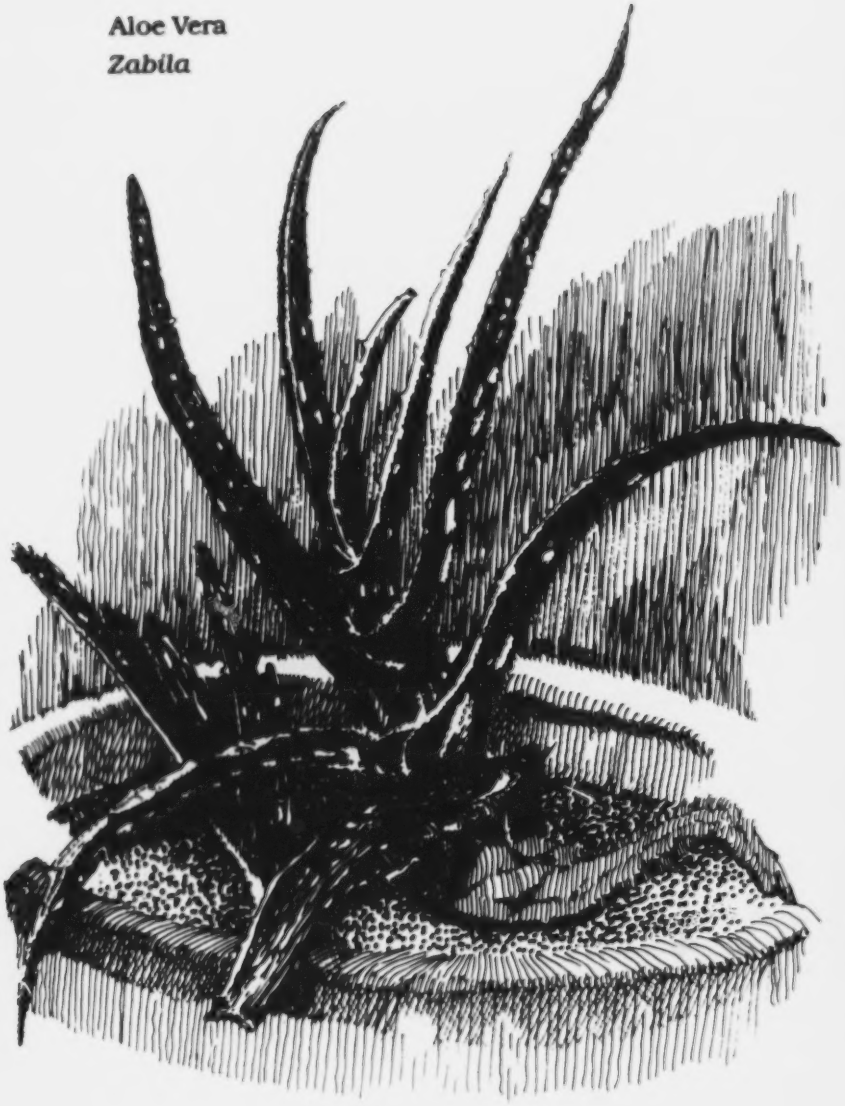
Yarrow ***Milenrama***

Yarrow is another plant supposedly used to induce abortion. It, in fact, has a multiplicity of reported uses.

Externally, a tea brewed from Yarrow is said to be an insect repellent which can be splashed over the body. The same tea is also used as a skin lotion. Fresh Yarrow leaves, applied to a wound, will allegedly stop even a profuse flow of blood and will also stimulate clotting. A poultice of dried leaves will, it is said, disinfect and promote healing.

Taken internally, Yarrow is thought to have the same effect, supposedly decreasing the menstrual flow and stopping internal hemorrhage. It is also taken to decrease the likelihood of varicose veins and to banish leg cramps. The same tea is a mild laxative and, some say, stomach tonic.

Aloe Vera
Zabila



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Further Reading

Should you wish to continue reading about folk medicine or herbal healing the following is a list of books which might interest you. This list is not meant to be exhaustive:

Green Pharmacy, Barbara Griggs (Viking, 1981): This is a history of herbal medicine, including the disputes and controversies that have surrounded it through the ages. It makes no mention of curanderismo, but does include an account of the way in which the birth control pill was derived from the Mexican yam.

Herbs and Things, Jeanne Rose (Workman, 1972): A charming and informal herbal which includes such things as herbal baths, veterinary potions, sachets and potpourris, and a section entitled "Various Forbidden Secrets," e.g., some ceremonies from witchcraft.

Mexico's Ancient and Native Remedies, Evelyne Winter (Editorial Fournier, 1968): This sounds more promising than it is. It is not a collection of old remedies, but rather, a collection of the remedies of various people whom Winter encounters.

Grandmother's Tea, Joe Graham (Institute of Texan Cultures, 1979): This was really designed for school children and provides a very elementary approach to herbal healing in the Mexican-American culture. There is a slide show which goes with the text, however, and a good bibliography.

Folk Medicine and Herbal Healing, G. Meyer, Kenneth Blum, and John G. Cull, eds. (Charles C. Thomas, 1981): It will probably be hard to find this book, even in libraries. It is a collection of articles on the subject in "an effort to present ... the current status of folk healing and herbal medicine." The editors are based in San Antonio, and, though their intention

is to discuss all folk systems rather than just curanderismo, many of the articles have a Mexican-American slant.

Cooking and Curing with Mexican Herbs, Dolores L. Latorre (Encino Press, 1977): This beautiful book is illustrated with woodcuts. About two-thirds of it could be called a cookbook. The healing portion lists conditions and diseases and then the herbs which are said to cure them.

— · —

Some books which are about the practice of curanderismo rather than the more specialized subject of herbal medicine would, nonetheless, make interesting follow-up reading. A few good ones are:

Curanderismo: Mexican-American Folk Psychiatry, Ari Kiev (The Free Press, 1968): Kiev's research was done in San Antonio. He examines the therapeutic aspects of curanderismo from the point of view of a psychotherapist and concludes that curanderismo is beneficial in many ways, not the least of which its recognition that emotions can strongly affect physical health.

Folk Practices in Northern Mexico, Isabel Truesdell Kelly (University of Texas Press, 1965): This is a hard book to find, but it focuses on beliefs relating to health. Although the study was done in Mexico, the findings also apply to Mexican-Americans.

Curanderismo, Robert T. Trotter and Juan Antonio Chavira (University of Georgia Press, 1981). Primarily addressed to health care professionals, this book seeks "to lessen cultural barriers to the delivery of health care to Mexican-American patients" by providing background information on curanderismo.

Afterword

I hope that the information presented in this book has given you a greater appreciation of green medicine, which has been around since the beginning of man and has evolved through the centuries.

The valuable knowledge of herbs has basically been passed from mother to daughter and from father to son. Nowadays, however, many second and third generation Mexican-Americans are forgetting the traditional use of green medicine. For this reason, I have chosen to elaborate on the subject here.

The Mexican and Mexican-American practice of green medicine has been of special interest to me and I hope to aid, in some small way, in keeping that knowledge alive.

It has always been a source of pride to me – as it should to everyone with Mexican ancestry – that Mexican-American herbal medicine is the product of such a rich blend of European, Asian, and native Indian knowledge and tradition.

Perhaps it is this that has sparked the interest in both the historical and therapeutic aspects of herbal medicine now being shown by those who are not members of the Mexican-American community.

I hope that this book will answer the need for information on this subject. Much of it is not readily available, and often, when it can be found, is addressed to the scholar or botanist rather than the average person with an interest in herbal medicine.

This book then, like the herbs which are its subject, is also a remedy of sorts.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE